

# PROFESSIONALLY SPEAKING

## The Story of AFT Professional Staff in Higher Education



*A Union of Professionals*

**AFT Higher Education**

**THE FASTEST GROWING GROUP OF ACADEMIC EMPLOYEES** in higher education today is professional staff. Holding hundreds of job titles and descriptions, they play an integral role in knitting together the diverse and complex parts of our higher education institutions.

Professional staff are:

- Recruiters and registrars
- Program directors
- Academic advisors
- Computer programmers, physicists and engineers
- Laboratory technicians
- Medical personnel, counselors and psychologists
- Admissions officers and financial aid officers
- Librarians without faculty appointments and library support staff

...and many more professionals vital to their higher education institutions.

## HIGHER EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL STAFF



Yet despite deep dedication to their institutions, professional staff often struggle with invisibility. Through their union, they seek a presence on campus and in workplace decision-making.

ABOVE: AFT leaders celebrate a collective bargaining law for public employees with New Mexico's Gov. Bill Richardson; a librarian with United Faculty of Florida assists a student at FSU; college lab techs rally with fellow members of AFT's Professional Staff Congress at CUNY; AT LEFT, AFT United University Professions member Karren Bee-Donohue, a SUNY director of capital projects.



PHOTOS— NM: Clyde Mueller; FL: Mona Lisa Abbott; NY: PSC and UUP

**IN PURSUIT OF A VOICE**, professional staff have turned to the American Federation of Teachers. Among its 1.3 million members, the AFT represents 150,000 faculty and professional staff at colleges

## WHO WE ARE



and universities around the country. Working in active, autonomous and democratic locals, AFT members are

winning financial gains for professional staff while advancing professional treatment and representation for all members.

The AFT, its state federations and locals recognize the unique needs of professional staff for:

- Limits on workload and overload
- Advancement and promotion
- Job protection and security
- Professional development
- Fair treatment in dispute resolution, and a
- Voice in decision-making.

Inside this brochure, you will meet the dynamic members of the AFT's higher education locals and witness the strategies that have won a better life for our professional staff members.



ABOVE LEFT, professional staff members from AFT's Cook County College Teachers Union in Illinois gather for an ice cream social. ABOVE RIGHT, members of AFT's UCPEA, the University of Connecticut Professional Employees Association, demonstrate in Hartford against state budget cuts; ABOVE, a research scientist at Florida A&M University represented by United Faculty of Florida.

## Urgent Issues for Professional Staff: AFT's Record of Achievement

The AFT is an experienced partner at the bargaining table, winning both economic gains and improvements in the crucial arena of career advancement and opportunity for professional staff.

The **United College Employees of the Fashion Institute of Technology (UCE-FIT)** in New York City was one of the first higher education unions in the U.S. to win a single collective bargaining contract for both faculty and professional staff. This early collective strength has led to a model contract for professional staff which includes:

- Salary schedule and benefits identical to classroom faculty's;
- Tenure earned after three years;
- Rank and advancement steps same as classroom faculty;
- Seats reserved for professional staff on the union's executive committee and bargaining teams, and FIT's Faculty Association.

The **Council of New Jersey State College Locals** represents over 1000 professional staff members. To advance their concerns, the Council created a Professional Staff Committee whose chair sits on the Executive Board of the full council. This strong presence has positioned professional staff to negotiate:

- A salary upgrade that rewards an employee's personal growth, training and advanced degrees, allowing an employee to advance even after rising to the top of the pay scale;
- Multi-year contracts;
- Career development leaves similar to sabbaticals; and
- Opportunities to teach.



**"Respect for professional staff is written into the language of our contract. It emphasizes 'the importance of the professional staff to the excellence of the University' and calls us 'an integral part of the university's mission.'"**

— M. Kevin Fahey, associate director for campus activities, and president, UCONN Professional Employees Association, holding an array of contracts.



**“Here is professional development at its best—our union won an annual fund of half a million dollars *and* the freedom to make peer judgments of projects that merit support.”**

— Iris DeLutro, senior counselor and a vice president of the Professional Staff Congress, City University of New York (CUNY).

The **United University Professions** at the **State University of New York (UUP/SUNY)** is a diverse union of 28,000 members that includes more than 11,000 professional staff. The UUP:

- Designates a vice president for professional staff on its officers’ board to focus primarily on professional staff;
- Provides a *Guide for Professionals at SUNY*, a handbook of rules and advice for new and current professional staff; and
- Addresses the issue of advancement and promotion by enforcing a 45-day timeframe in which supervisors must respond to a staff member’s request for a promotion.

The Western Illinois Chapter of **University Professionals of Illinois (UPI)** has confronted the challenges of a growing workload that includes uncompensated “on call” time and the expansion of night work. New solutions include:

- Credit for comp time measured as equivalent to, not a fraction of, extraordinary hours worked; and
- A Unit Workload Document (UWD) in which workload obligations and provisions for awarding time-off are clearly stated.



TOP, Isabelle Potts, an assistant in research from AFT’s local at Florida State University, supervises PhD. candidates. ABOVE, members of AFT’s Council of New Jersey State College Locals celebrate at the New Jersey State House after passage of domestic partner legislation.



Over the years, the **Professional Staff Congress/City University of New York (PSC/CUNY)** has secured steady gains, which include:

- Contractual job security modeled on faculty tenure;
- A \$500,000 annual Professional Development Fund to provide grants to professional staff members;
- A labor management committee to hear professional staff concerns on workload; and
- Equity increases to boost salaries of those in lowest paid positions.

The PSC is currently focused on creating a path to promotions for professional staff, and resisting workload speed-up.

The **University of Connecticut Professional Employees Association (UCPEA)** has won extraordinary access to education funds for its professional staff members. Today, UCPEA's 1,300 members enjoy:

- A reliable flow of professional development funds;
- Tuition waivers; and
- A strong partnership with the university.

In Illinois, the **Cook County College Teachers Union (CCCTU)** has committed itself to improving professional development through contract negotiations. The local has bargained for:

- A large sum of money in every contract to be used for professional development and training; and
- Other funds for tuition and courses.

CCCTU also successfully launched a local for part-time professional staff at the city colleges in Chicago, thus challenging the colleges' attempt to reshape their workforce with lower-wage staff who have no benefits.



Karen Mattison, UUP

**"SUNY's 11,000 professional staff members are a respected voice in every conversation. The university and the union depend on us."**

— John Marino, associate director of medical radiology and vice president for professionals, United University Professions, State University of New York.

The **United Staff-University of New Mexico (US-UNM)** won the right to represent professional staff at the University of New Mexico in 2001. The current contract for US-UNM sets standards for workday and workweek schedules, including:

- Workload guidelines, and
- Flexible schedules for both part-time and full-time staff.

In Philadelphia, the **Temple Association of University Professionals** has made fair treatment of employees a significant focus in negotiations for professional staff. It has won:

- A due process clause on binding arbitration;
- An independent arbitrator to hear complaints over classification upgrades, discipline or other unfair practices; and
- Tuition remission, like the faculty's, for staff and their families.



Mona Lisa Abbott



TOP, Florida State University librarians, represented by the United Faculty of Florida. LEFT, professional staff members from AFT's Portland Community College Faculty Federation at the college's Workforce Training Center in Oregon.

**"Getting together to organize a union galvanized all of us. Suddenly we belonged to a group of new allies who could work together to solve our problems."**

— Al Findeisen,  
Chemistry Coordinator,  
Temple (University) Association  
of University Professionals

Michael Morrow/PCCFF

## What the AFT Brings to the Movement of Professional Staff

At the AFT, we believe – and we have seen – that high quality staff contribute greatly to the quality of education that an institution provides. Our commitment is to that excellence and to developing initiatives that will help our students and institutions of higher education.

Resources of a national union:

- Political clout in state capitals and Washington, D.C.
- Affiliation with the AFL-CIO, labor's voice in higher education
- Extensive member benefits and insurance
- Access to local, state, national and international information
- Strength in numbers

For professional staff, the AFT also provides:

- Training in bargaining and handling of grievances
- Model contract language
- Leadership development
- Local budget analysis
- A voice in AFT policy decisions
- Full union rights and respect

## Contact the American Federation of Teachers

To learn more about AFT professional staff and their locals, visit AFT Higher Education's Web site at

[www.aft.org/higher\\_ed/prostaff/index.html](http://www.aft.org/higher_ed/prostaff/index.html).

Or call AFT Higher Education at 800/238-1133, ext. 4426.



Professional staff from Chicago State University take a vote at a meeting of the AFT's University Professionals of Illinois (Ellie Sullivan-UPI PHOTO)

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